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# Renovation of historic bridge kicks off

Shaun Sproule

Renovation work has begun at a historic bridge along the Old Johannesburg Road.

This was after residents expressed concerns about maintenance at the bridge, according to a local councillor.

Wierda bridge crosses the Hennops River for northbound traffic.

DA's shadow MEC for roads and transport in Gauteng, Fred Nel, was happy that work was being done on the historic bridge.

"Some residents were concerned that it was not being maintained, especially given its historic nature. We decided to request that the bridge be maintained and then the department agreed to come to the party and fix the bridge."

The bridge, while not dangerously damaged, was showing signs of rust.

"Because it is a monument, the government has a responsibility to attend to the state of the bridge. We want to prevent damage due to rust as well."

With the bridge being dealt with, Nel said that more work needed to be done in the area to ensure safety on the roads.

"Our biggest problem now is the pollution in the waterways that sometimes blocks the water passing the bridges and causes flooding."

Ward councillor Cindy Billson explained that the bridge was important to fix as it was built in 1891 and is a heritage preservation site.

Billson is the Chairperson for Social, Development, Sports and Arts and Culture in the city.

"I am grateful for heritage being preserved and keeping history alive," she said.

"The bridge serves many residents well and will continue to do so in the future. This is very symbolic to me – bridging yesterday and tomorrow," she said.



Councillor Cindy Billson with DA shadow MEC for roads and transport, Fred Nel, at Wierda Bridge in 2021.

According to Billson, in the 1950s, the Old Johannesburg Road was widened in some areas, and a second parallel bridge for the southbound traffic was built. The existing bridge was kept for north-bound Pretoria traffic, to keep the historic bridge preserved.

This steel girder bridge is one of the first of its kind to be built in South Africa, according to Dutch Footsteps (an initiative to showcase Dutch influences in South Africa).

It was built based on a hinge system, with a heavy hinge and nut bolts connecting the main parts at the knot points.

The bridge was designed in the offices of the Department of Public Works, ordered from Germany, delivered to Natal and then transported by ox wagon to the site.

The architect, Sytze Wopkes Wierda, was renowned as the first government architect and engineer in the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR). The Centurion suburb, Wierdapark, was named after him.



The bridge was built in 1891 and the materials were transported by ox wagon to the site.